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Congress, the CIA, and 'The Year of the Spy'

Washington.

1985 WAS "the year of the spy" to *Newsweek* magazine and may be remembered as the "year of the press" by the intelligence community. Espionage cases, two-way defectors, leaks, and charges about the quality of intelligence and its congressional

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oversight have brought on singular public scrutiny.

The debate on intelligence goes on amidst this scrutiny. It is a debate our democratic and open society makes unique and uniquely difficult. Most of us believe that secrets must be kept and that good intelligence is essential to national security, but we also think that intelligence agencies must be watched to improve their performance and to prevent abuse.

Since 1976, the task of keeping an eye on these agencies has been given to the House and Senate Intelligence Committees. The oversight committees try to decipher the world of intelligence — to know its goals, sources, and methods, and to keep it operating within agreed limits. These committees alone review the intelligence activities of the executive branch. Because their oversight is exclusive, it must be thorough.

The committees have the near-impossible task of trying to satisfy a public hunger for information about the government's secret activities while respecting the executive branch's desire that each secret shared with the committees should remain so. The approach of the House Intelligence Committee in this regard has been to say little to the press or to our colleagues about its work, although any member may ask to review committee documents at any time he chooses.

This is a frustrating compromise, because neither the press nor our colleagues can be expected to trust the committee's judgment in the absence of extensive public debate on behalf of its recommendations.

Lately, this task of legislative review has become more difficult. In a recent public letter to Senator David Durenberger of Minnesota, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, central intelligence director William Casey asserted that this process "has gone seriously awry." Mr. Casey suggests intelligence oversight cannot be conducted well if conducted publicly.

While aspects of the director's concerns are understandable, I do not share his judgment that the process has gone awry.

Although it is not always evident to the public, the intelligence committees have been struggling with spy cases and the other security problems that beset the intelligence community. They have significantly increased counterintelligence funding and personnel in the last six years, and are reviewing in detail each of the spy cases and attempting to learn from them.

The House committee has also reviewed its own security procedures and personnel practices to ensure they continue to match intelligence community standards. The size of the committees is kept small, and the members are chosen by the congressional leadership with great care. While there have been no documented leaks of classified information from the intelligence oversight committees, any security system can bear improvement. A security review for the Congress as a whole is warranted.

In addition to security, the committees have an important role in improving the performance and product of the intelligence community. They can stimulate support for specific intelligence-gathering and analysis activities, and can assure that intelligence agencies are sufficiently funded for their tasks. They burrow deeply into arcane budgets and operations, and few of the details they hear behind closed doors can be disclosed. The committees' overall judgments, however, and the general outline of their debates can and should be made public. This aspect of public disclosure can be helpful in shaping better policy.

Within the committees, there is strong bipartisan backing for the intelligence community's basic mission. But what the intelligence committees cannot do is resolve in secrecy hotly debated foreign policy issues which concern many Americans and are properly addressed by the Congress as a whole.

Nicaragua, the subject of so many recent congressional battles, is one obvious example. Angola may be another. The intelligence committees rarely want to get into a public dispute with the administration. However, this cannot be avoided on contentious foreign policy issues related only in part to intelligence activities.

There is a committee consensus that we have excellent intelligence services, supported by dedicated, skilled, and patriotic professionals. We also believe they can be better. We want a cost-effective and responsible intelligence community, mindful of the privacy of our own citizens, and able to give the right person the right information at the right time.

The job of Congress is to provide adequate resources to meet that goal, and to offer the president the advice of an independent, but supportive, partner. In our system of checks and balances we have the opportunity and responsibility to do this work together.

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